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ABSTRACT

To provide international students at New Jersey's Brookdale Community College with exercises on cultural awareness, a Human Development Workshop on Cultural Identity has been designed. The workshop includes exercises on language, cultural relationships, cultural identity, and styles of achieving. The program is designed to help students feel free enough to express their feelings about displacement in a setting with other international students. Sample exercises used in the workshops include the following: (1) writing down idiomatic and colloquial expressions in students' native languages and explaining their meaning; (2) listing English idiomatic and colloquial expressions and discussing their meaning; (3) demonstrating different styles of greeting in students' countries of origin; (4) explaining the meanings of specific gestures in different cultures; (5) discussing the traditions, foods, and holidays of students' home countries and how they are different and/or similar to those of the other students' countries; (6) listing the social groups to which students belong and explaining the activities in which they participate; (7) describing important people from students' native cultures in the arts, sciences, politics, history, and other fields; (8) comparing allowed forms of social interaction in the United States with those of other countries; (9) discussing the strengths and contributions of students' native cultures to American society; (10) explaining the use and manufacture of typical artifacts from students' countries of origin; and (11) distributing a list of nine achieving styles for discussion and identification among students. (Contains 11 references.) (MAB)

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ED 384 382

A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP ON CULTURAL IDENTITY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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JC 950 342

The purpose of this paper is to outline a Human Development Workshop on Cultural Identity (Hud 96A for one credit), that I shall teach at Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, New Jersey during the Winter, 1996. Approximately twelve to fifteen students will be enrolled. The workshop will include exercises on cultural differences and similarities presented in ten sessions of one and a half hours each. To prepare the material, I have done research on cultural differences and cultural identity, and I have also interviewed thirty international students from Brookdale Community College. These interviews were conducted in a casual manner and individually. The students' answers have suggested what key aspects of the material would be most appropriate for the international students and what to emphasize in the exercises. As the leader of the workshop, I shall open each exercise by providing my own personal experience. At age eighteen, I was an exchange student from Ecuador in Salem, Oregon; my proposed workshop, therefore, is something I can relate to and for which I can provide personal examples.

The proposed workshop will include exercises on:

- language
- cultural differences/similarities
- cultural identity
- achieving styles

I will utilize literature included in the bibliography of this paper as reference materials during the workshop sessions.

International students need special attention because they have been uprooted from their native culture and are no longer in their "comfort zone." When we uproot or transplant a bush or flower from one pot to another, or from a pot to the ground, it needs tender loving care in order to flourish in the new place. A human being who is uprooted needs that tender loving care, as well. Erik Erikson (1964) presents a similar analogy when he talks about being uprooted:

> Beyond this you will recognize in the symbolism of ropes a variation on the theme of roots which pervades our imagery on the subject of transmigration. There roots are torn out or are brought along, dry up in transit or are kept moist and alive, find an appropriate soil, or fail to take hold and wither. (p.88)

My desire in this workshop is to help international students feel free enough to express their feelings about displacement in a setting along with other international students. They will have in common the fact that they have left their cultures behind to enter a new culture and have now become foreigners and minorities. In addition, the members of this group all share the problem of having English as a second language and of speaking with an accent. This camaraderie and commonalty will give them a sense of belonging to this group. As Professor Marsha Levy-Warren of Princeton University states in Leaving Home: On The Formation Of Cultural Identity:

> cultural identity permits people to feel the sense of belonging which was once reserved for their homes in situations other than home and with people other than members of their families. What children perceive in concrete terms (a place in which they belong), adolescents perceive in more abstract form (a group to which they belong). This occurs in tandem with and is made possible by the fuller development of the capacity for abstract thought in adolescence. (p.2)

> It is especially hard for adolescents whose personal histories have left them in a state of cultural loss or confusion to find a comfortable niche for themselves in the multicultural world in which they live. (p.3)

In the novels Lost in Translation, by Eva Hoffman (1989), and How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, by Julia Alvarez (1991), there are many descriptions in which the main characters struggle with the hope of trying to find inner peace and a sense of identity. For example Eva's melancholy is shown in her homesickness for the places and people she left behind in Cracow:

> Underneath my carefully trained serenity, there is a caldron of seething lost loves and a rage at the loss. And there is- for all

> that- a longing for a less strenuous way to maintain my identity and my pride. I want to gather experience with both my hands, not only with my soul. Essential humanity is all very well, but we need the colors of our time and the shelter of a specific place. (p.139)

Professor Levy-Warren (October 1994) stated in a class lecture included in the course "The Formation of Ethno-Cultural Identity" that, upon leaving a culture of origin, there is a mourning process for one's past culture. I can relate very keenly to this concept because when I decided to leave Ecuador and reside in the United States, I did not realize then that I too would mourn my lost culture. During the specific holidays of the city where I grew up, I have at times felt so homesick that I have telephoned my family to know how they were celebrating the day. Even though I have accepted what I have lost and now enjoy the holidays celebrated in the United States (such as Thanksgiving), occasionally I still feel the sudden melancholy that Eva Hoffman describes.

Until a foreigner has acquired fluency in the new ***language***, he or she feels awkward. This is expressed by Hoffman (1989):

> Because I'm not heard, I feel I'm not seen. My words often seem to baffle others. They are inappropriate, or forced, or just plain in-comprehensible. People look at me with puzzlement; they mumble something in response--something that doesn't hit home. Anyway, the back and forth of conversation is different here. People often don't answer each other. But the mat look in their eyes as they listen to me cancels my face, flattens my features. The mobility of my face comes from the mobility of the words coming to the surface and the feelings that drive them. Its vividness is sparked by the locking of an answering gaze, by the quickness of understanding. But now I can't feel how my face lights up from inside; I don't receive from others the reflected movement of its expressions, its living speech. People look past me as we speak. What do I look like, here.? Imperceptible, I think; impalpable, neutral, faceless. (p.147)

A related example of the difficulty of inarticulateness in a new language mentioned by Julia Alvarez (1991) is: "There was no meanness in this face, no kindness either. No

recognition of the difficulty she was having in trying to describe what she had seen with her tiny English vocabulary. "(p.162)

There are cultural differences in communication styles in addition to speaking a different language *per se*. For example, the Japanese, use the word *hai*, yes, during the course of a conversation. Nevertheless, the Japanese mean only that the message was heard, not necessarily agreed upon (See Appendix 1).

Exercise 1, in the language component of the workshop, will be to write some idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms in one's native language, then explain the meaning of each.

Exercise 2, in the language component, I shall request the group to list idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms that they know in English and discuss their meaning.

I remember having a conversation with my son in his bedroom when he was thirteen. In the middle of the conversation, in reaction to something I said, my son exclaimed, "Get out of here." I felt crushed. I went to my bedroom and sat on my bed. I was hurt and speechless. After a few seconds, he walked into my bedroom to continue the conversation. It was obvious to him that I was upset. When he asked me, very concerned, "What is the matter?" I said, "If you throw me out of your bedroom now, when you are thirteen, what can I expect as you get older?" He hugged me and said, "That is only an expression; do not take it literally." I felt relieved. This is an example of how misunderstandings arise because the English as a second language speaker interprets a phrase literally and is oblivious to the idiomatic meaning of the phrase.

Crespo Gonzalez (1990, pp. 53-68), of Adelphi University, writes in her article that she asked sixty Puerto Rican adults to respond to the Thematic Apperception Test in both Spanish and English. Responses were analyzed by comparing the number of emotional words and the emotional content of stories in each language. The results showed that Spanish was used more often when speaking to parents, relatives, and older individuals. Even fluent English-speakers preferred Spanish in some situations for the

expression of emotion. These findings show the impact of a bilingual background and specifically suggest that the language spoken in early childhood affects emotional and social development. These findings have important implications in psychotherapy. I think that when a person seeks counseling, he/she needs a therapist who speaks the same native language. A person feels more at ease talking about his/her concerns and emotions in his/her native tongue than in an acquired one. In addition, psychological tests would be more appropriately given to bilingual individuals in their main language. Otherwise, I think, the test would lose its validity. Alvarez (1991) also refers to the effect of bilingualism when an individual is in the middle of an emotional situation:

> The radio is all static--like the sound of the crunching metal of a car; the faint, blurry voice on the airwaves her own, trapped inside a wreck, calling for help. In English or Spanish? she wonders. That poet she met at Lucinda's party the night before argued that no matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue. (p. 13)

Each human being is unique; there are no two people with the same fingerprints, voice, and personality. Nevertheless, as we grow in a particular society we tend to acquire common tendencies or cultural norms. Some norms that are acceptable in one society are not acceptable in another; for example, being late for a social invitation in the United States is not acceptable, whereas in most Latin American countries it is even fashionable to be ten to twenty minutes late to a social occasion. ***Cultural differences*** vary widely from one country to another. Something with one meaning in one area may mean the opposite elsewhere. Attitudes toward punctuality vary greatly from one culture to another and, unless understood, can cause confusion, misunderstanding, and even anger. Japanese and Germans tend to be very punctual while many Latin Americans have a more relaxed attitude toward time.

When crossing cultural lines, something as simple as a greeting can be misunderstood. The form of greeting differs from culture to culture. My interviews with

thirty international students confirmed this. Traditional greetings may be a handshake, hug, kiss, placing the hands in praying position, or various other gestures. In Italy and in many Latin American countries, greetings and good-byes are done with a handshake. In some Latin American countries, female friends kiss on the cheek and male friends embrace. The traditional Thai greeting, the *wai*, is made by placing both hands together in a praying position at the chin and bowing slightly. The higher the hands, the more respectful the gesture. The fingertips should never be raised above eye level. The gesture means "thank you," "I'm sorry," as well as, "hello." Failure to return a *wai* greeting is equivalent to refusing to shake hands in the West.

Exercise 3, in the cultural differences/similarities component, would be to role play the different styles of greeting according to the country of origin of the students in the class.

Exercise 4, in the cultural differences/similarities component, will be a type of "show and tell" in order for the participants to explain specific gestures that convey specific messages in different cultures. Misunderstanding of gestures is a common occurrence in cross-cultural communication and misinterpretation, along these lines, can lead to social embarrassment. The "OK" sign, commonly used in the United States, is a good example of a gesture that has several different meanings according to the country where it is being used. In France, "OK" means zero; in Japan, it is a symbol for money; and in Brazil, it carries a vulgar connotation.

Alvarez (1991) narrates the story of an immigrant family from the Dominican Republic. In various instances, she vividly portrays how the daughters had to adjust to two different cultures when they traveled back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the United States. For example: "This is not the States," Tia Flor says, with a knowing smile. "A woman just doesn't travel alone in this country. Especially these days." (p.9)

Exercise 5, in the cultural differences/similarities component, would be to discuss traditions, foods, and holidays of each student's country and how they are different and/or similar to those of the other students' countries. Customs also differ not only from country to country but from region to region. For example, on the coast of Ecuador the typical food is quite diverse, but, most dishes are made of plantain. In the highlands, people mainly eat dishes made of potatoes. Another difference, is that the people in the highlands tend to be more conservative than the people who live on the coast.

Professor Levy-Warren (MS) provides a definition of ***Cultural Identity*** as a sense of feeling connected to a group based on religion, national origin, class, ethnicity, activity, sexual orientation, or geography. The need for cultural identity can be observed in several instances in the novels I have read. A good example of a self-conscious grasp of one's cultural identity is Eva Hoffman's reaffirmation of her Jewishness. One day Eva's mother declares,:

> "It's time you stopped crossing yourself in front of churches. We're Jewish and Jews don't do that." It doesn't come as that much of a surprise, really. Of course, I've known we're Jewish as long as I can remember. That's why everyone died in the war. But the knowledge has been vague, hazy; I didn't understand its implications. I feel almost relieved at having it officially confirmed.(p.29) The confirmation of Jewishness is something definite; it is something that I am. (p.32)

In addition to finding her cultural identity in terms of religion, Eva Hoffman had to learn to find a new identity, that differed from that of her parents, because of the difference in their upbringing. This happens also to the Garcia sisters in <u>How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents</u>. They were often unable to discuss their social dilemmas with their parents because of the differences in their cultures.

The same happens to deaf children. They have to separate from their parents in order to learn their culture if the parents are from the hearing world. Cohen, in <u>Train Go Sorry</u> (1994), describes the deaf culture and how it is acquired in special schools and

through social activities in the deaf community. The author elaborates on the difficulties deaf individuals have in being the minority in a culture where hearing individuals are the majority. Apparently, what the deaf community looks for is acculturation, development of the ability to adapt to the dominant culture without losing one's own. Nevertheless, just as in any other culture, there is a sense of pride in belonging to the deaf culture. Sofia, one of the characters in the book writes: "I am Deaf and Jewish girl." (p.31). The importance of being deaf is so great for her that she labels herself deaf first. Being deaf takes precedence over her Jewish religion and her place of origin, Russia. James, another character in Train Go Sorry, also had to adapt to two cultures, black and deaf. In The Atlantic Monthly, Dolnik emphasizes the importance of American Sign Language (ASL) for the deaf. He states:

> ASL is the everyday language of perhaps half a million Americans. A shared language makes for a shared identity. With the deaf as with other groups, this identity is a prickly combination of pride in one's own ways and wariness of outsiders. (p.40)

I know a young man, named Luis, who is twenty-two years old. He has been deaf from birth but was born of hearing parents. His family moved to New Jersey from Puerto Rico only six years ago. When they came from Puerto Rico, he attended a special high school for the deaf. He adjusted very well to his new school and to New Jersey. His mother says that when he was a baby, and they learned that he was deaf, they invented their own sign language. They continued to develop more and more signs between the parents, their three hearing daughters, and Luis, their deaf child. As a result, they have always communicated quite effectively with Luis. When he learned American Sign Language, he utilized this system at school but, at home, he used the invented familiar signs to communicate with his family. He graduated from high school and is now working in a factory. He is very involved in family activities and goes out with his friends.

I think he is an example of a member of a minority group who is completely acculturated to the cultures that surround him.

Before I read Dolnik's article, and Cohen's book, I did not think of the deaf as having a separate culture, *per se*. However, both of these authors compare the deaf culture with other cultures in terms of history, traditions, and pride. Both the book and the article emphasized the importance of having separate schools for the deaf where the deaf culture is developed. The importance of having deaf teachers, who, thereby, also become positive role models for the students, was also stressed.

In ***Exercise 6,*** as part of the cultural identity component, I shall ask the participants to list the social groups to which they belong and to explain the activities in which they are involved. This will be an exercise in which students can reaffirm their new identities in these developing subcultures. For instance, when I was an exchange student from Ecuador in Salem, Oregon, at the age of eighteen, the family with whom I was living arranged for me to go on Sundays to a Catholic church with one of their neighbors. Her name was Susan. We became friends and I felt connected with her because we shared the same religion and spiritual bond.

I shall request that the students in ***Exercise 7***, as part of the cultural identity component, recall and describe important people in the Arts, Sciences, Politics, History, etc. fields from their native cultures. I believe that role models are of vital importance in social learning, cultural identity, and the development of personality. After they have identified outstanding individuals in these different areas, they can choose one figure in order to do some research about him/her for extra credit. Friedlander, in her book Being Indian in Hueyapan (1975), narrates the life history of Zeferina, an atypical Indian from Hueyapan, Mexico. She portrays her as a strong, self-sufficient, hard-working, bossy, and determined woman. Because of her husband's death, Zeferina found herself as the head of

a household at the early age of twenty-six. The role of a female as the head of a household was not a foreign concept in her life because both her mother and grandmother had become heads of households as a result of the death and separation of various male relatives. Her strong role model was her maternal grandmother, whom she imitated in many ways, especially in her life as a merchant. Zeferina learned at an early age how to negotiate, buy, and sell by observing her grandmother when she accompanied her on lengthy business trips. This exemplifies Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory of Modeling (DiCaprio, 1974). Bandura states that we learn through observation.

In ***Exercise 8,*** as part of the cultural identity component, each student will be required to think of the "do's and don'ts" of socializing in one's native country compared to the new ways of socializing here in the United States. Most likely they will find differences as well as similarities in how people socialize in different cultures.

Each individual in ***Exercise 9,*** as part of the cultural identity component, will be requested to describe to the group the strengths and contributions of one's native culture to the American society. By becoming more aware of this aspect of their native culture, international students will feel more accepted in the greater North American society and more proud of their origins.

In ***Exercise 10,*** as part of the cultural differences/similarities component, I shall request that students bring artifacts typical from their country of origin to the workshop and explain their use and how they are made. This could even prove to be an excellent opportunity to discuss in some degree some historical aspects of the different countries.

During the "Formation of Ethno-Cultural Identity" course at Princeton University, Professor Levy-Warren defined the difference between assimilation and acculturation. "Assimilation" is the assumption that minorities lose their distinct characteristics and become indistinguishable from the dominant group. On the other hand, "acculturation" is the process of adapting to the dominant culture but, at the same time, maintaining a separate cultural identity (October, 1994).

Gomez and Fassinger, studied how acculturation affects Latinas' achieving styles. They define the process of acculturation as:

> a process of adjusting one's attitudes, values, and behaviors to accommodate the host culture. Acculturation may occur simultaneously along both Latino and Anglo-American dimensions if the environment is bicultural rather than monocultural.(p. 205)

Latinas growing up with two cultures would be influenced by both, therefore, through socialization, they would learn achieving style preferences of the Hispanic culture, as well as, the Anglo-American culture. The different achieving styles discussed in the study are within three major orientations: direct, instrumental, and relational. Each orientation includes three sub-styles:

> *Intrinsic-direct style:* focuses on task mastery and internalized standards of excellence to measure success...
>
> *Competitive-direct style:* characterizes individuals who focus on mastering a task better than all other competitors...
>
> *Power-direct style:* prefers to take charge, organizing and controlling others to meet their goals...
>
> *Personal-instrumental style*: uses personal characteristics--such as charm, position, or family name--to further their goals...
>
> *Social-instrumental style:* characterizes persons who use their networks of relationships with others to advance their goals...
>
> *Entrusting-instrumental:* delegates tasks and responsibilities to others to achieve on their own behalf...
>
> *Collaborative-relational style:* characterizes persons, such as team players, who achieve through group effort...
>
> *Contributory-relational style:* achieves by directly contributing to others' tasks...
>
> *Vicarious-relational style:* characterizes an individual who

> achieves indirectly through identifying with others' tasks and goals...

The results of the study indicate that the more bicultural the individual is, the more achieving styles she has available to her. Biculturalism includes, in Gomez's and Fassinger's study, Hispanicism and Americanism. Hispanicism reflects a more interpersonal approach favoring interdependence and collaboration, whereas Americanism favors more competitiveness, direct approaches, and power. The results also suggest the conflict that Latinas have in maintaining their Hispanic cultural identity within the greater North American Society. I know from personal experience that this is difficult. Many times I have needed to assert myself against bias, negative assumptions, and plain discrimination because of my dual minority status as a Latin American woman.

After discussing the above study with the group, in ***Exercise 11,*** as part of the achieving styles component, I shall distribute a hand-out containing the list of the aforementioned nine achieving styles described in this study. I shall ask the group to review the list and decide with which styles they can identify. Which ones do they use in their daily lives to achieve their goals? I shall divide the class into small groups of three in order to facilitate this exercise.

My objective in developing this workshop is to help international students at Brookdale Community College develop more positive feelings about their roots, affirm their cultural identities, and become more aware of and sensitive about the differences and similarities that exist amongst the various cultures. Each human being is so complex that we have to be vigilant to avoid potentially harmful generalizations, stereotypes, and assumptions. I hope that throughout the exercises students will appreciate the idea that differences are a blessing; without them life would be monotonous.

Another important purpose is to help these students achieve a sense of belonging to the workshop group, to other social groups, to their places of origin, and to the North American society in which they now reside. A sense of belonging is vital for the

development of cultural identity, for the achievement of inner happiness, and for the realization of inner peace. Some of the characters portrayed in the various novels that I read struggled to find that inner peace because of their uncertainty regarding where they truly belonged. In addition, I feel achieving a sound knowledge of the specific idiomatic expressions and slang of a second language is vital to a non-native speaker. Without this knowledge, a foreigner feels left out in conversation, confused, and is likely to misunderstand the meaning of what has been said. Thus, I created the language section of this workshop in order to touch upon these issues. I included achieving styles in the body of the workshop because I believe that exposing foreign students to different styles would be beneficial to their overall success. Perhaps they will decide to increase their repertoire of achieving styles.

This type of workshop could be universally utilized with international students of any college or university. Opening the workshop to non-international college students would expose them to different cultures and mutually enrich all participants. In addition, this workshop can readily be transposed to the faculty level as sensitivity training for a population that is becoming increasingly diverse.

I have gained immense fulfillment through my research. I hope that this workshop will enrich my students and expand their horizons as greatly as the process of its creation has enriched its author.

Appendix I

The Japanese, for example, rarely use the word "no" but may frequently use the word "hai" (yes) during the course of a conversation. But to the Japanese, "hai" only acknowledges that what has been said has been heard—it's not agreement.

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